

Christ Episcopal Church | Valdosta, GA

The Third Sunday of Easter | April 19, 2026

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Let us pray. Open the eyes of our hearts, Lord. We want to see you. Amen.

Good morning, and Happy Easter!

The prayer we just prayed contains the lyrics to one of my favorite Happening/Honey Creek songs, and it came to mind as I read through today's readings in preparation for this sermon.

As most of you know, the Easter season lasts 50 days, comprising 7 Sundays. Today is the 3rd Sunday of Easter, and also the 3rd week that the Gospel reading is about Jesus appearing to his Disciples after his resurrection. Two weeks ago, on Easter Day, we heard about his appearance to Mary Magdalene, and last week was "Doubting Thomas Sunday".

Not only is today the 3rd Sunday of Easter, it also happens to be my son, Thomas' birthday. His birthday often falls during the 2nd week of Easter so we've had lots of laughs through the years about that, teasing him and calling him Doubting Thomas. But as I was contemplating the readings for THIS week, I actually thought about the day my Thomas was born. He was born the week following a very stressful time in the life of our family. My father-in-law had died the week before and his funeral had been the day before he was born. I had a regular appointment with my obstetrician that morning at which she told me to go on to the hospital. Well, Thomas is my 4th child, so of course I was NOT prepared to go straight to the hospital. I had 3 small children, ages 2, 3 & 5 at home for whom I needed to make arrangements. And I'm sure I still needed to pack a bag. Once the kids were finally settled, we did go on to the hospital. My labor and delivery were as uneventful as birthing can be, but once he was born, things took a turn. Thomas turned blue and he was making grunting sounds that concerned the doctors. We were immediately pulled from our sense of joy, elation, and relief, which we were not prepared for. After all, he was the 4th baby and the first 3 had been fine. We spiraled into feelings of anxiety and fear.

The doctors and nurses were focused on what was happening in the moment. They started talking about the possibility of having to send him down to Shands if he didn't start improving. We were distraught and couldn't think straight. Then something happened. The pediatrician said to me, "If I didn't know better, I'd think Thomas was a 36 week baby, not a 37 week baby." That was the AHA moment, the proverbial 2x4 against my head, where I STOPPED and was brought back to my senses. I immediately said, "He IS a 36 week baby!" I had been telling my doctor the whole time that they had miscalculated my due date. And at that, the pediatrician nonchalantly said, "Well then, if that's the case, he's FINE!"

I was so sucked into the whirlwind of activity, stress, and commotion that I couldn't see the forest for the trees. I had lost sight of what I knew deep in my heart to be true – or as what Happy Ingeman taught me many moons ago, what I "Knew in my Knower". How many times have the cares of the world and life circumstances derailed you and discombobulated your focus to the point that you were so caught up in the moment you couldn't see past the here and now, in spite of what you knew deep down?

In today's Gospel reading, Cleopas and his companion are walking and talking along the road to Emmaus, after what I can only imagine was a week from Hell, when a "stranger" walks up and starts talking to them and inquiring about what they were discussing. They didn't recognize Jesus, perhaps because they were consumed by their grief, or their fear, or confusion, or even maybe out of pure exhaustion. At any rate, Jesus asks what they're talking about, and I wonder if they might have thought, what rock did this dude climb out from under that he doesn't know what has happened. So, they tell him about their experience. At that, Jesus, who may have been a little exasperated by them, opens to them what the scriptures had foretold of him beginning with Moses. But, they still didn't see Him.

It was not until they STOPPED. They arrived where they were going and invited Jesus to stay with them. There, Jesus took the bread, blessed and broke it, and THAT is when they finally recognized him.

I like words, and I like to learn about the roots and meanings of them. The word recognize jumped off the page at me. The base word is COGNIZE, which Merriam-Webster defines

as know or understand. Similarly, cognizant means knowledgeable of something especially through personal experience. And of course the prefix RE, means again or anew, which implies something has already happened before. So recognize means to know or understand again or anew.

Cleopas and his companion knew Jesus, after all, they were his followers and he, their Rabbi. They just couldn't see him. The aha moment happened when they finally STOPPED, and Jesus broke the bread. This is what brought them back to their senses to what they "Knew in their Knower". They acknowledged it when they said, "were not our hearts burning within us while he was talking to us on the road, while he was opening the scriptures to us?" The Word of God INSPIRED them, it made their hearts burn, and they were fed with Christ's Body in the bread. God was made known to them through scripture and in the breaking of the bread. I believe they were filled with the Holy Spirit. And what did they do then? They didn't sit and bask in it. They went back to Jerusalem, they traveled 7 miles again, after a LONG DAY, to share the GOOD NEWS!

We are invited to STOP, and gather as the Church, week after week to hear the Word of God and to be fed with the bread that is broken for us, to be filled with the Body of Christ. Like Jesus' first disciples some 2,000 years ago, God is made known to US through scripture, in the breaking of the bread, and the prayers - through Word and Sacrament. We are invited to STOP. To set aside the cares and concerns of the world, where we don't always see God, where we might feel like God has vanished from our sight like Cleopas and his companion experienced. We are invited to be REfilled with Word and Sacrament, to be REMinded that God is ever present. There's that RE prefix again... Re-filled and Re-minded. Another one is Re-turn. We're not called to just come and get our fill and then sit and lounge about in our fullness. No. We are called to REturn. To go back out into the hustle and bustle of our lives and share what we have been given.

At the Last Supper, Jesus said "Do this in Remembrance of me." We gather as the living Body of Christ to be nourished by Christ who is given and known to us in the Breaking of the Bread, and to be inspired by the Word of God, and empowered by the Holy spirit so that we can then go out and be the hands and feet of Christ in the world. To share the

bread broken for us with a world waiting to be fed. “To have genuine mutual love, loving one another deeply from the heart”, as we hear in the First Letter of Peter.

We come together to re-member, to re-charge, to re-group, to re-new, to re-fresh. We STOP and set down those things that burden us and prevent us from seeing what is right in front of us. We gather around the Table, with our open hearts and eyes, and outstretched hands to RECEIVE the Gifts of God for the People of God. We do this to be strengthened to be able to go back out, going about our lives, walking our own paths, our own roads to Emmaus if you will, that tend to be wind-y and rocky at times, and where we are often consumed and distracted by the cares, fears, concerns, and circumstances of our lives, where we can get derailed. Maybe it’s a sick child, a job situation, or a devastating loss or diagnosis of some sort. These are things that can make us forget that Christ is indeed walking alongside us, meeting us where we are, but we don’t see him. We don’t recognize him. But we are invited in our own blindness to return again and again to Taste and SEE , through the Sacrament of his Body and Blood, so that we may be reminded of, and recognize God’s ever presence.

May we be nourished through Word and Sacrament so that our hearts burn within us, and the eyes of our hearts are opened, and we know in our knowers that the Risen Christ is present among us. And may we recognize Him in each other.

In His holy Name.

Amen.